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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN FEDERATION COUNCIL CHAIRMAN ON US,  
EXTREMISM LAW, INTERNAL POLITICS

REF: MOSCOW 9817

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In advance of his trip to the US to commemorate 9/11, Russian Federation Council Chairman Sergey Mironov previewed with the Ambassador a fall legislative effort to amend the Law on Extremism. Mironov said the reaction to the announced merger of leftist political parties was enthusiastic, but discounted the ability of Russia's beleaguered "democrats" to get beyond leadership differences in time to compete successfully for the 2007 Duma. Mironov took issue with criticism of Russia, praised Putin's reassertion of Russian national interests, reaffirmed the need for US-Russian partnership, and welcomed further US-Russia senatorial exchanges. While Mironov appears to be an obedient player in the political competition being readied for the 2007 and 2008 elections, it will be important to monitor whether the populist appeal of the leftist parties' platform challenges the management of Russia's democracy.  
End Summary

U.S. Visit; 9/11 remembrance  
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12. (SBU) In a September 8 meeting with the Ambassador, Federation Council Chairman Sergey Mironov reviewed his trip to the United States for the New Jersey dedication of the statue by Russian sculpture Zurab Tsereteli in honor of the victims of 9/11. Mironov said he would meet with CFR President Richard Haass, hold his second conversation with Henry Kissinger, conduct an interview with the Washington Times, anticipated a meeting with UNSYG Annan, and would wrap up his short visit with a press conference before Russian-American journalists. The events of 9/11, he underscored, were a tragedy that had served to unite the US and Russia. Mironov noted Putin's personal interest in the dedication.

On the Agenda: Amending the Extremism Law  
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13. (C) Beyond the traditional focus on the budget, Mironov confirmed that the Federation Council would take up amendments to the Law on Extremism -- a law that Mironov characterized as necessary, but excessive. In particular, criticism of the government should not qualify as extremism. The Ambassador welcomed this initiative, noting that the recent outburst of racial tensions and violence in Karelia highlighted situations where there would be sharp differences of opinion on the performance of the government that constituted legitimate and normal political dialogue.

New Opposition Leftist Party Takes Root  
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14. (C) Now was the time and place, Mironov explained, to

create a new, powerful political party that would not be a pale imitation of the party of power, United Russia. The platform of the newly merged three parties (reftel) would focus on the protection of workers, particularly civil servants, with a special emphasis on the needs of the retired military, who left the service in the prime of life, but were poorly equipped to adjust to the civilian workplace and unable to live on their miserly pensions. The union of political parties was necessary to combat the monopolization of political life by United Russia. Consultations were going well, with chapters already present in half of the federal jurisdictions. In contrast to United Russia, Mironov noted, his party would need to rely on the popular support of the Russian people, rather than administrative resources. To date, Mironov expressed satisfaction at the enthusiasm generated by the announcement of the merger.

#### Liberal Rightist Forces in Disarray, Few Prospects

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15. (C) Mironov was pessimistic about the prospects for unity among the "democrats," noting that there was no end to the long-running soap opera of divisions within the political leadership of Yabloko, SPS, and the Republican Party. Comparing the relatively seamless cooperation between the three newly merged political parties (and fresh from a trip with new party cohort and Rodina party Chairman Babakov to Astrakhan), Mironov said the rightists were plagued both by leadership disputes, as well as by a lack of resonance among the Russian public. Complicating the issue was the fact that United Russia already espoused many of the "rightist" economic principles championed by the democrats, narrowing the political field open to them. Mironov concluded that the rightist political parties had zero chance of crossing the

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threshold into the 2007 Duma.

#### Defense of Putin, Umbrage at Misguided US Criticism

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16. (C) Mironov noted Putin's optimism about relations with the United States, but took issue with sharp comments emanating from the US political establishment on trends in Russia. Russia was an independent, sovereign country that had its own national interests to protect, just as America was an "imperial" power, with interests that would sometimes lead it in a separate direction. Mironov underscored the pragmatic basis of Russian foreign policy, its embrace of flexible alliances, and its espousal of multiple vectors and poles in international relations. The GOR, he stressed, sought partnership with the US, at the same time that it would protect its own sphere of influence. He praised Putin for not being afraid to articulate Russian national interests and reassert GOR influence, at the same time that he sought to strengthen the US-Russia partnership. The world was not well-served by unipolarity. The GOR emphasis, Mironov repeated, would be on Russia's national interests, with active pursuit of relations in southeast Asia, Europe and Latin America.

17. (C) The Ambassador explained that criticism from American leaders and the US foreign policy establishment reflected real concern over the growing concentration of power in the Kremlin and the weakness of institutions critical to providing healthy democratic checks and balances. Mironov responded that the US misinterpreted political developments within Russia, pointing to the debate that erupted following the Kremlin decision to appoint, rather than elect, Governors. Mironov recalled his visit to Canada, where he claimed that the distribution of power between the center and the provinces made leaders sympathetic to Russian concerns over the dilution of federal authority. No country, Mironov said (alluding to the Yeltsin legacy) could tolerate the dissolution of its authority; no country, he repeated, voluntarily divested itself of influence over its territory.

The relationship between the President and the Governors was now healthy. Without reforms, Mironov insisted, Russia would not function. Mironov, pointing to criticism and debates in the mass media, and unfettered access to internet, dismissed criticism of government encroachment in the media.

18. (C) Mironov underscored the sea change in attitude among Russians, who in the depths of the 1990's used to refer to Russia as "this country," rather than "my country." Etymology reflected the psychology of the moment, he underscored. Now there was palpable pride in the fact that Russia was able to assert itself and its interests in international relations, as well as a sense of common purpose. Materially, intellectually, and culturally, the country was moving forward. The Ambassador responded that his interlocutors often accused the US of underestimating what Russians had overcome in the 1990s. However, while there may be elements of competition in Russian and US relations, both countries benefited from cooperation--including, between members of the legislative branches. Mironov agreed, and said he looked forward to the potential return visit of Senator Lott to Russia, as part of the US-Russia senatorial exchange.

Comment

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19. (C) Mironov defines the "loyal opposition," whose political prominence has been more a function of his friendship with Putin than his dynamism on the hustings. While the verdict is out on the degree to which the union of leftist parties will fare among regional leaders looking to curry favor with the party of power, its populist appeal to those elements of society who believe that the windfall oil wealth of Russia has not trickled down could resonate. The provincial elections and the leadup to the 2007 Duma elections will provide the first evidence of whether managed democracy produces any surprises. End Comment  
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